

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group
19 September 2018
Item No. 10

REPORT AUTHOR: HEAD OF PROTECTION

SUBJECT: ARSON CASE STUDY

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Background Papers: None

Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL		FINANCIAL	
HUMAN RESOURCES		EQUALITY IMPACT	
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	
CORPORATE RISK	Known	OTHER (please specify)	
	New	CORE BRIEF	

Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.

PURPOSE

To provide Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group with a case study on how the Service responds to incidents of deliberate fire setting in domestic dwellings.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group consider the report provided.

1 Actions Taken on First Response

- 1.1 On 11 June 2018 at 00:52 hours Fire Control received a call to a fire in a bungalow in a residential area of Luton. The first fire appliance arrived on scene at 01:00. A total of three fire appliances attended and breathing apparatus teams assisted by the use of thermal imaging cameras searched the property and extinguished the fire using two high pressure hoses. The whole building was affected by fire and smoke damage.
- 1.2 On the basis of initial information gathered on-scene the fire was declared 'persons reported'. However, on searching the property it was found to be unoccupied at the time of the fire. The attending crews noted that there were signs of forced entry to the property and appeared to be two separate seats of fire (in the kitchen and in a bedroom) – clear indications of a deliberately set fire. Mindful of this, crews struck an appropriate balance between scene preservation and ensuring that the fire was fully extinguished. Group Commander Steve Allen, who is a member of the Service specialist Fire Investigation Team, had attended the fire as part of the initial response for Incident Command purposes and then took responsibility for fire investigation.
- 1.3 Uniformed police also attended the incident and it was noted that there was excellent on-scene liaison from the police duty Sergeant and police assisted FRS greatly with scene safety, inner cordon control and initial enquiries. Immediate house to house enquiries were commenced on the night.
- 1.4 The son of the householder attended on the night of the fire and GC Allen briefed the family member of the situation. The family member facilitated the necessary permissions to legally enter the property for fire investigation purposes. Victim support was discussed, but not required by the family as the elderly owner is currently in care and the bungalow was unoccupied.
- 1.5 Normal protocol is to secure the fire scene and defer investigation until daylight hours. Unfortunately police scene guard was not possible due to operational difficulties, however, police arranged for the property to be boarded up overnight and placed a police vehicle on the drive to assist with scene integrity and ensure preservation of evidence.

2 The Fire Investigation

- 2.1 GC Allen returned to the scene the following morning and carried out a joint fire investigation with police Scenes of Crime Officer (SOCO) in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Fire Investigation. Scene evidence indicated a deliberately set fire following a burglary of the property.
- 2.2 CID had been assigned to the case and a Detective Constable attended the scene to liaise with the investigation team and the family representative. Following the Fire Investigation SOCO remained at scene carrying out further forensic work around the burglary. The forensic investigation recovered blood within and just outside the property. The presence of blood may explain the fire as an attempt to mask or obscure DNA evidence (dependant on the offender(s) forensic awareness).
- 2.3 The blood recovered at the scene was identified as belonging to an individual known to be staying with a neighbour close by the scene. A warrant was issued for the arrest of the suspect who was known to the police.
- 2.4 GC Allen completed a formal Fire Investigation report which may subsequently be presented in evidence in criminal proceedings.
- 2.5 Police have subsequently arrested an individual wanted in connection with the incident. GC Allen has remained in touch with CID and has now received a formal request to provide a Fire Investigation report for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The report will be drawn from findings in the original Fire Investigation contemporaneous note and will be submitted to the CPS via CID. This submission will include confirmation that GC Allen will be available to attend crown court as required.

3 Other Actions

- 3.1 GC Allen gave further support to the family, providing advice on notifying insurers and assisting with recovery of documentation from the property to facilitate this process. The property was handed back to the family following the burglary investigation.
- 3.2 A referral was made by the Police to the victim hub following the incident.

- 3.3 Subsequently to the incident an after fire 'hot strike' was carried out with calls to 10 properties in the immediate vicinity. Cards were left at those properties where the householder was not at home at the time of the call. This initiative resulted in two households taking up the offer of a 'safe and well' (home fire safety check) visit.
- 3.4 GC Allen will provide feedback on progress and outcomes of the investigation to SOCO colleagues. This is standard practice as SOCO colleagues are not always included in outcomes of cases if they are not required to attend court. This supports the positive working relationship which underpins the intent in the MOU.
- 4 Recommendation

That Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group consider the report provided.

**SOC IAN EVANS
HEAD OF PROTECTION**